

# *New Jersey Conservation Foundation*

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LAND USE INVENTORY OF THE TWELVE BLOCK AREA  
AND PRELIMINARY DESIGNS FOR VACANT LOTS ON  
SOUTH EIGHTEENTH STREET FOR THE  
TRI-CITY CITIZENS UNION FOR PROGRESS

September 1979

Land Use Inventory of the Twelve Block Area and Preliminary Designs for Vacant Lots on South Eighteenth Street for the Tri-City Citizens Union for Progress.

Land Use Inventory

During September of 1978 a program was initiated to inventory the physical features of a twelve block portion of the West Park Area: from Springfield Avenue north to sixteenth Avenue and from South Seventeenth Street west to South Twentieth Street and the boundary line between Newark and Irvington. The purposes of the inventory were as follows:

- to identify and spatially locate the varied types of land use with the area
- to describe the physical conditions of all structures and vacant lots with the area
- to ascertain ownership status of each lot
- to provide information for the formulation of plans and designs for vacant lots

Throughout the fall the inventory was prepared by the architectural and planning firm of Guerra and Musial of Elizabeth, and staff of the New Jersey Conservation Foundation and the Tri-City Citizens' Union for Progress. Each building lot was visited to determine land use, structural condition and architectural style of buildings, condition of vacant lots and condition of trees and paving. Information for each lot was recorded on separate sheets; a sample of which is attached. Ownership data was obtained from the tax records of the City of Newark.

Utilizing the data sheets and ownership information, separate maps were prepared for the twelve block area showing the following:

- Condition of Vacant Lots; maintained, unkempt, blighted
- Land Use; residential, residential/commercial, commercial, institutional and semi-public, vacant, play lots and other uses
- Ownership; absentee, resident owned
- Structural Condition of Buildings; good, fair, poor, boarded up or abandoned, mixed and vacant

Based on the above data the following observations of the twelve block area can be made:

- Vacant lots: There are approximately 65 vacant lots throughout the twelve block area. Of these 26, or 40 percent, are being maintained; 15, or 23 percent are unkempt requiring minimal maintenance such as cutting of vegetation and the clean up of small amounts of litter; and, 24, or 45 percent, are severely blighted requiring considerable effort to remove litter, waste construction materials, old cars and some dilapidated out buildings. Through relatively little effort over 50 percent of the vacant lots could be cleaned up for a variety of uses by the residents. Of course, once cleaned up the problem becomes one of preventing future deterioration.

- Land Use: The preponderate land use is residential, consisting of 410 lots out of an approximate 650 lots in the twelve block area. A small amount of commercial use is largely concentrated along Springfield Avenue. Other commercial uses are scattered throughout the area mostly on lots facing the avenues. Institutional use is the next largest category of use. Most noticeable is the school located at lot 10, block 350 between South Eighteenth Street and South Seventeenth Street and Eighteenth and Seventeenth Avenues.
- Ownership: Ownership data indicated that slightly more than 50 percent of the lots were owned by residents. Tri-City staff questioned the accuracy of the data and in their experience feel that considerably less than 50 percent of the lots are resident owned. City tax data is suspect since it is common knowledge that property owners will often list for tax purposes their residence as the property when in fact they are absentee owners. Consequently this data must be revised as more accurate information becomes available. However, if future adjustments are not considerable the number of resident owners throughout the area is greater than anticipated.
- Structural Condition: The building stock throughout the twelve block area is relatively sound requiring only basic maintenance such as painting and trim work. Few structures exist which require major repair or appear to have serious structural deficiencies. Thirty structures are abandoned or boarded up.

#### Vacant Lot Designs

Concurrent with the preparation of the preceeding inventory the staff of Tri-City, Musial and Guerra, NJCF meet periodically with residents of South Eighteenth Street from Springfield Avenue to Nineteenth Avenue. The purposes of these meetings were:

- to identify people in the neighborhood who might be interested in the conversion of the vacant lots to recreation or open space uses
- to solicit the ideas of the neighborhood residents regarding their thoughts on neighborhood beautification
- to introduce the residents to the resource people who would attempt to put their ideas into design drawings and plans.

On the west side of South Eighteenth Street three vacant lots are present on the north end of the block, one lot in the middle and two lots on the south end. On the east side of South Eighteenth Street three vacant lots exist along Springfield Avenue, four in the middle of the block along South Seventeenth Street and three at the corner of Nineteenth Avenue and South Seventeenth Street. A general meeting was first conducted for all residents of the area. During this meeting the residents identified the following needs:

1. additional off street parking for automobiles
2. the creation of several separate recreational areas for young children, adolescents and adults
3. an ability to drive automobiles up to the backs of buildings
4. additional security for the vacant lots
5. clean up and continual maintenance of vacant lots

Based on this meeting the architects formulated preliminary design concepts which include the provision for a one way interior road system within the blocks, identifying vacant lots for resident off street parking and identifying vacant lots for a community gardening area, tot lot, adult siting park, and an adolescent sports area. Meetings were then held with residents immediately adjacent to each lot to explain the drawings and to solicit further input. Attendees at the meetings expressed their agreement with the concepts and expressed a willingness to provide assistance with each project.

Conclusion: The inventory study showed the presence of a sound housing stock in the area with a higher than anticipated level of resident ownership, although this latter data is suspect, and the presence of numerous vacant lots which could be converted to community uses. Residents of the area expressed their interest in using vacant lots for off street parking and recreational uses. It also appears that they are residents in the area who would take an interest and assist in converting the vacant lots to these alternative uses.